

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 7, 2014

Agenda Item: 2014 Early Season Migratory Bird Seasons

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Migratory bird seasons have direct federal oversight. Hunting seasons must be set within federal frameworks. Mourning dove and common snipe have fixed season dates—Sept. 1-Oct. 30 for doves; Sept. 1-Dec. 16 for snipe—and fixed bag/possession limits from year to year. No changes are proposed for the 2014 mourning dove and common snipe seasons.

The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of sandhill cranes is annually monitored, with individual states' allowable harvest quotas based on observed numbers and coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Montana, crane numbers (3-year average) and hunter access have been used to set permit numbers for each of five areas (Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell, Warm Springs area, Ovando-Helmville, Wheatland/Meagher/Golden Valley/portion of Sweetgrass Counties, and Broadwater County). RMP crane numbers in the multi-state, coordinated survey in September 2013 increased, but the 3-year average remains low, so the allowable harvest for each state will be reduced slightly. Montana's RMP harvest allocation will be reduced from 144 in 2013 to 127 in 2014. The Montana crane harvest has consistently been well below allowable levels, with an estimate of 94 birds taken in 2013, compared to a harvest allocation of 144. FWP proposes maintaining permit numbers in most hunting units for the 2014 season, but in the Ovando-Helmville unit increasing the number of cranes allowed per hunter from 1 to 2. Numbers of permits and hunters have been kept low in this area and others due to limited hunter access, and the proposed increase will allow more opportunity with the same number of hunters. The remainder of the Central Flyway is under frameworks for mid-continent sandhill cranes, for which the federal framework remains unchanged for 2014.

Other than the increased crane bag from 1 to 2 in the Ovando-Helmville unit, FWP proposes no changes to either RMP or the mid-continent crane season for 2014 although season dates would change for both due to calendar progression, but with no change in season length.

Season dates for RMP sandhill cranes (special drawn permits): Sept. 13–Oct. 5

Season dates for mid-continent sandhill cranes: Oct. 4–Nov. 30

The Dillon/Twin Bridges/Cardwell RMP crane unit was already expanded by the Commission at its February, 2014, meeting to include all of Madison and Gallatin Counties.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposals may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment, and/or Commission discussion.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period on any adopted proposal will run through 5 p.m. Aug. 4, with final adoption at the Aug. 7 Commission meeting. Public comment is typically limited on this topic.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission adopt the proposed 2014 early migratory seasons as originally proposed in July. This is consistent with known wildlife biology, management history, and survey efforts. The proposed seasons are within the frameworks established by the USFWS.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt the final 2014 early season migratory bird seasons as presented by FWP.